

Why are Bush and the establishment letting Lithuania down?

AS Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich, there was much on his mind.

The Sudetenland was historically German; it had been ceded to Czechoslovakia at Versailles; its people had been mistreated; they wanted to reunite with their kinsmen. Had a plebiscite been held, a majority would have voted to go home to Germany.

Moreover, the prime minister did not want his country going to war over a "faraway people about whom we know very little." That was his reasoning; what is our excuse?

Why are we appeasing Mikhail Gorbachev?

Vilnius has not asked for tanks or troops; she has only asked that the United States, the lighthouse of freedom, stand beside her in this terrifying hour in which she has chosen to stand up for liberty.

The conduct of the United States government passes from the inexplicable to the shameful. When even the leader of tiny Estonia can come to Vilnius to offer a symbolic sword of defense, why are we behaving like this? Comes the chorus: We must save Gorbachev.

But if the Soviet dictator is the sort of man who will choke a country to death, why save him? If we look away as he strangles Lithuania, what kind of people are we?

DIVIDING LINE



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To watch the American establishment unite behind this cynical policy is as instructive as it is disheartening.

Addicted to summits and showpiece agreements, the White House and State Department are said to be enraged with President Vytautas Landsbergis. Is it not ever thus? Blame the victim.

Dr. Henry Kissinger suggests Lithuanian freedom may have to be postponed, so as not to interfere with the Great Game of state-manship.

The U.S. press, ablaze

with righteous indignation when South Africa booted reporters out of its black townships, meekly accedes to Gorbachev's order to get out of Lithuania. Having canonized him Man of the Decade, the establishment press has a vested interest in his image, and is moving to cover that investment.

In the great tradition of Walter Duranty, the New York Times' man in Moscow who won a Pulitzer covering up Stalin's Ukrainian holocaust, columnist John Oakes demands that George Bush lean on the Lithuanians: "If [they]... are deceived into thinking... a sympathetic America will continue to support them right down the line — the results could be catastrophic for the Lithuanians, destructive for President Gorbachev, and highly dangerous for the United States."

"Catastrophic for the Lithuanians"? But how would a Moscow apologist like Oakes know better than this persecuted people what is in their interest? And if choking Lithuania is "destructive" of Gorbachev, who's fault is that?

"Dangerous for the United States"? Why? What will Moscow do

should George Bush lose his practiced self-control and blurt out, "God bless Lithuania!" Shower us with rockets?

Landsbergis may be a prickly character, whose timing and tactics are less than perfect. But there is no doubt who is right here.

There is no doubt where history will place him — beside the murdered Imre Nagy of Hungary, beside Poland's Lech Walesa, beside President Vaclav Havel.

Defiant Lithuania is exposing Gorbachev as a bully and thug, the man,

through a glass darkly. Not pretty, is it?

In his fulmination against the American right, Oakes betrays himself and his class. They have always been more comfortable with "reform" communists than with their conservative countrymen, whom they obviously despise.

Good to know. Because the true allies of the right are not in the State Department, nor at The New York Times. They are in the streets of Moscow, marching for Lithuania. They are the millions, from Ukraine to Kamchatka, the Kola Peninsula to the Aral Sea, who have had a bellyful of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and want freedom.

Even the neo-conservatives have abandoned the right, to join the establishment. But they are not only wrong in principle, they are wrong in terms of cold pragmatism and national interest.

A Wall Street Journal poll may show that, by 3-to-1, we Americans prefer Gorbachev to Lithuania. But does anyone think these numbers will stand up as broken Lithuania goes down?

We are a moral people. When this Baltic republic

abandoned by the West, goes under, we will be disgusted with our conduct; and when the victor of Vilnius arrives in May, a crocodile grin from ear to ear, we will take it out on him, because we were cowardly when we should have been brave.

And if, bankrupt and broken, Lithuania is still holding out when Gorbachev walks down that ramp to swap smiles and toasts, does anyone think we will cheer him?

The West's affair with Gorbachev is over, finished.

What kind of Soviet Union do we want? That is the issue. Is it not a free Russian federation, whose republics choose to be there, whose people are rid of a bloodstained party that has oppressed them for 72 years?

Mikhail Gorbachev has revealed himself to be an enemy of that Russia; why, then, is he our indispensable friend?

Winston Churchill said of the men at Munich that, faced with a choice between dishonor and war, they chose dishonor, and got war. All that was asked of us was that we show as much moral courage as tiny Estonia. We failed the test.

Whatever the Lithuanians think of us now, they are surely right.

In appeasing the Soviet bully, we fail the test of moral courage

we now recall, who dropped millions of mines camouflaged as toys on Afghan villages.

As the Lithuanians stand up, we see Moscow clearly now, and, no longer